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“I Was Going to Build a new Republican Party and a New Majority”: Richard Nixon as Party Leader, 1969–73¹

ROBERT MASON

Richard Nixon gained a poor reputation as President for his work as leader of the Republican Party. His attitude towards the party was seen as neglectful at best, destructive at worst. It was clear that Nixon revelled in the details of electoral politics as far as his own position was concerned, but it seemed equally clear that he had little concern for the political fortunes of his party at large.² Among the most partisan of American politicians during his earlier career, Nixon seemed to shrug off this partisan past when he reached the White House in 1969. But this understanding of Nixon's relationship with the Republican Party is in some respects misleading. Although it is true that his record provides significant examples of presidential neglect of the party, it also contains equally significant examples of presidential concern about the party's future. Few American Presidents of the modern era paid much attention to their responsibility for party leadership, so the nature of Nixon's support for the Republicans distinguishes him as a party leader of notable strength rather than notable weakness.

This, then, is an ambiguous record. It is the minority status of the Republican Party that offers a partial explanation for the ambiguity. It explains Nixon's frequent desire to distance himself from his party – particularly

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¹ This is a comment made by Nixon to his aide Monica Crowley in 1993. Monica Crowley, *Nixon Off the Record* (New York: Random House, 1996), 149.

² See, for example, Harold F. Bass, Jr., “The President and Political Parties,” in Michael Nelson, ed., *Guide to the Presidency*, 2nd ed., vol. I (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1996), 826–27, and James W. Davis, *The President as Party Leader* (New York: Praeger, 1992), 196–97.

during the presidential campaigns of 1968 and 1972 – because he had little to gain and much to lose by stressing his Republican identity at a time when more Americans considered themselves Democrats. But it also explains his wish to strengthen the party, because the Democratic control of Congress jeopardized the achievement of his goals in public policy, especially with respect to the war in Vietnam. This is why Nixon took a different view of party leadership from that of his recent predecessors, who had discovered little need to devote serious attention to this role, because party mattered relatively little to the successes and failures of the presidency.³

The development of the modern presidency during the New Deal involved “the transcendence of partisan politics,” according to Sidney Milkis, as the executive branch, rather than the legislative, amassed new responsibilities to meet the social and economic problems of the day. The approach to government adopted during the New Deal emphasized an enlarged White House, together with an array of executive departments and agencies, amounting to a framework of government through administrative rather than party channels. But this conception of government contained a significant flaw. In permitting the President to conduct government business largely through the executive branch, it assumed that Congress would remain broadly supportive of presidential actions.⁴ This was not true for Nixon, the first President since Zachary Taylor in 1849 to begin his term facing a hostile Congress. The problems of divided government had a number of implications for the nature of Nixon’s presidency. First, they sometimes induced him to rein in partisan passions that might alienate Democrats whose support he needed. Second, they often supported a desire to strengthen further the capacity and responsibilities of the executive branch in order to circumvent the role of the legislative branch, significantly increasing institutional conflict. Finally – and, because the first two implications fostered non-partisan behaviour, paradoxically – they led Nixon to think creatively and constructively about boosting the strength of his party. In doing so, he pursued concerns that he had often discussed throughout his political career; Margaret C. Rung points out that Nixon had frequently

³ Similar factors account for Dwight Eisenhower’s interest in reconfiguring the Republican Party during the 1950s. Cornelius Cotter, “Eisenhower as Party Leader,” *Political Science Quarterly*, 98 (1983), 255–83; Sidney M. Milkis, *The President and the Parties: The Transformation of the American Party System since the New Deal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 161–69.

⁴ See, especially, Milkis, but also Sidney M. Milkis, “Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Transcendence of Partisan Politics,” *Political Science Quarterly*, 100 (1985), 479–504, and Sidney M. Milkis, *Political Parties and Constitutional Government: Remaking American Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

spoken out against the centrality of executive bureaucracy and the marginality of party to modern American politics.⁵

The challenge posed by Republican minority status does not solely explain Nixon's work as party leader, however. The other part of the explanation for the idiosyncratic nature of Nixon's work as party leader is his belief that the Republicans might escape their minority status and replace the Democrats as the nation's majority. Such gains seemed possible within a political climate of growing conservatism among the electorate and disillusionment with the Democratic Party. *The Emerging Republican Majority*, published in 1969 by Kevin P. Phillips, an aide in the Justice Department, was the most prominent intellectualization of a belief that Nixon shared with many in and out of politics during this period.⁶ At the grass-roots level, the 1960s had seen significant new activism in support of conservative politics and equally significant disenchantment with Democratic politicians and their liberalism.⁷ Informing Nixon's work as GOP leader was an understanding that the party system was undergoing an electoral realignment and that he could take actions to maximize the benefits to his party of this critical period of political change.⁸ Without such a belief, affirmative work in support of the Republican Party from him was unlikely. Nevertheless, Nixon's response to this apparent opportunity for conservative politics was by no means in all respects helpful for the party. He devised and supervised elaborate strategies and operations to mobilize an enlarged coalition of electoral support, but their focus was always personal, seeking to increase his own electoral base, and only sometimes included an interest in the party.

No President of the modern era arrived in the White House with better qualifications than Nixon to tackle the tasks of party leadership. As Dwight Eisenhower's Vice President during the 1950s, Nixon led the partisan efforts of the administration to enthuse grass-roots activists and to secure the election of Republican office-holders.⁹ He then based his struggle to regain

⁵ Margaret C. Rung, "Richard Nixon, State, and Party: Democracy and Bureaucracy in the Postwar Era," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, 29 (1999), 307–23.

⁶ Kevin P. Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1969).

⁷ Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001); Kenneth D. Durr, *Behind the Backlash: White Working-Class Politics in Baltimore, 1940–1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 112–49.

⁸ Robert Mason, *Richard Nixon and the Quest for a New Majority* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

⁹ William Costello, *The Facts About Nixon: An Unauthorized Biography* (New York: Viking, 1960), 93–176.

the party's presidential nomination during the 1960s on a record of loyal support for Republican candidates and on a history of extensive travel to speak to Republican groups across the nation.¹⁰ This equipped him with a deep knowledge of the party. "Dick knows almost everything there is to know about the party's inner workings and geography," observed Charles McWhorter, an aide to Nixon, during the campaign for the presidential nomination in 1968.¹¹ Throughout this political career Nixon paid serious attention to the problem of the Republicans' minority status. Among his earlier speeches are discussions of strategies that the party should adopt in search of an electoral majority, and his work as Vice President and as a presidential candidate encouraged him to engage with these questions still more thoughtfully.¹² Nixon was well prepared in 1969 to lead the Republicans at such a time of political flux.

This examination of Nixon as party leader concentrates on two forms of party activity. First, during the midterm campaign of 1970 Nixon sought to repackage the Republican Party in a form more attractive to the electorate, with the lines of conflict between the parties redefined to the advantage of Republicans. Second, from 1970 and beyond the elections of 1972 Nixon sought to boost Republican strength by persuading key Democratic politicians to change party affiliation. In both, Nixon showed an activist approach to party leadership. He emphasized central decision-making within an institution that traditionally operated as a loose coalition of interests and factions and which usually lacked strong leadership. Thus he sought to promote ideological coherence within a party system usually characterized by ideological diversity; he believed that such coherence would benefit his party by winning increased support among conservative Democrats, whether politicians or voters. The claim that Nixon was, in these respects, an activist as party leader does not rely on an argument that he placed his party's needs above his own. Instead, he helped the Republican Party in order to help himself, and he ignored its concerns where they were unconnected with his political goals.

¹⁰ Jules Witcover, *The Resurrection of Richard Nixon* (New York: Putnam's, 1970).

¹¹ Garry Wills, *Nixon Agonistes: The Crisis of the Self-Made Man* (1970; New York: Mentor, 1971), 17.

¹² See, for example, excerpts from a speech by Richard Nixon, Los Angeles County Republican Assembly, 20 April 1949, PPS 208(1949).17, Richard Nixon Library & Birthplace, Yorba Linda, California; letter, Nixon to Raymond Moley, 19 Aug. 1958, "Moley, Raymond – Correspondence with RN 2 of 2," box 524, Richard M. Nixon Vice-Presidential Papers, Laguna Niguel, California; letter, Nixon to Claude Robinson, 9 April 1960, "Robinson, Claude 1960 (3 of 3)," box 647, Nixon Vice-Presidential Papers.

The ambiguous motivation for Nixon's interest in party matters explains his neglect of the Republican cause in some important respects. For example, Nixon failed to demonstrate any leadership of the Republican Party in Congress. Although his administration developed an ambitious agenda for reform-minded domestic policy – an agenda which confounded popular expectations of a Republican Party inclined to conservatism – Nixon did very little to mobilize the congressional party in support of these initiatives. Consequently, congressional Republicans offered lukewarm support at best to Nixon's "new American revolution" that notably included a far-reaching proposal for welfare reform, the Family Assistance Plan.¹³ This failure of party leadership partly reflected Nixon's own poor relationship with key Republicans in Congress.¹⁴ It also reflected his administration's relative weakness in the area of congressional liaison, despite imaginative efforts to engineer majorities for the administration in Congress, notably within the "floating-coalition" strategy devised by Bryce Harlow, the first chief of congressional liaison.¹⁵ The need to woo congressional Democrats perhaps reinforced the tendency among many in the White House to neglect congressional Republicans.

Nixon's work for the national committee was even less constructive. Like other Presidents of the period, Nixon believed that the main purpose of the in-party's national committee was to serve the political needs of the administration.¹⁶ Because Nixon concluded that the White House was the better institution for dealing with these needs, he neglected the Republican National Committee and was even ready to undermine its work. Party leaders in the states complained that the administration did not act in a sufficiently partisan way.¹⁷ In 1971, for example, he decided that RNC operations in areas of special interest to him threatened to interfere with the political outreach of the White House. Nixon therefore issued instructions that the relevant parts of the national committee be dismantled.¹⁸ The RNC division

¹³ A. James Reichley, *Conservatives in an Age of Change: The Nixon and Ford Administrations* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1981), 130–53.

¹⁴ Nigel Bowles, *The White House and Capitol Hill: The Politics of Presidential Persuasion* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987).

¹⁵ Reichley, 85.

¹⁶ Harold F. Bass, "The President and the National Party Organization," in *Presidents and Their Parties: Leadership or Neglect?*, ed. Robert Harmel (New York: Praeger, 1984), 59–89.

¹⁷ Memo, Harry S. Dent to Richard Nixon, 28 June 1969, "Memos to the President 1969 (3 of 3)," box 2, White House Special Files – Staff Member and Office Files (hereafter WHSF-SMOF); Harry S. Dent, Nixon Presidential Materials Project, National Archives, College Park, Maryland (hereafter NPMP).

¹⁸ H. R. Haldeman, *The Haldeman Diaries: Inside the Nixon White House*, CD-ROM (Santa Monica, CA: Sony Electronic Publishing, 1994), 10 Jan. 1971.

for ethnic Americans then saw its staff reduced by three-quarters, while the Mexican American project and the budget for the cultivation of Catholic voters were both eliminated entirely.¹⁹ Leonard Hall, who served as RNC chair during the 1950s, relayed to the White House his concern that the body would be “destroyed” by the administration’s political actions.²⁰

These aspects of Nixon’s relationship with his party as President support the characterization that he was hostile to its cause; nevertheless, he also worked to rectify the Republican Party’s minority status. During the midterm campaign of 1970 he fought to elect more Republicans to Congress, and he did so not merely through support for the candidates’ efforts. Nixon took centralized control of the campaign in order to use it as a vehicle by which he could redefine the lines of party competition to the benefit of the Republicans. This strategy of party redefinition took as its focus races for the Senate, where for historical reasons gains were most plausible.²¹ But its implications were greater still; more broadly, the campaign featured the dissemination of a message that the Republican Party articulated more effectively the views of a majority on an emerging set of issues.

Nixon’s involvement in the detail of the campaign began with the recruitment of strong candidates for the Senate, including George H. W. Bush in Texas and Richard Roudebush in Indiana. Nixon even broke a cardinal rule of party leadership; he intervened surreptitiously in a Republican primary when G. Harrold Carswell, his unsuccessful nominee to the Supreme Court in 1969, staged a challenge to William Cramer. Although Cramer was his chosen candidate, Nixon was eager to help Carswell and instructed his friend Bebe Rebozo to find funds to support this (ultimately unsuccessful) challenge.²² The second element of Nixon’s involvement, also intended to assert centralized control over the campaign, was his management of a limited portion of its funding. The distribution of money to supplement funds raised by candidates was usually in hands of the national committee and congressional campaign committees, but Nixon asked key donors to

¹⁹ Letter, Laszlo Pasztor to Charles Colson, 3 May 1971, and memo, Pasztor to Richard Richards, 29 Apr. 1971, “H.R.H. Memos – 1971 Jan.–June 1971 (2 of 3),” box 2, WHSF-SMOF: Charles W. Colson, NPMP.

²⁰ Rose Mary Woods notes, Sept. 1970, “Hall, Len,” box 28, WHSF-SMOF: President’s Personal Files, NPMP.

²¹ The last two elections for these Senate seats – in 1958 and 1964 – had taken place during particularly bad years for Republican candidates.

²² Numan V. Bartley and Hugh D. Graham, *Southern Politics and the Second Reconstruction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 146–47; memo, Nixon to Bebe Rebozo, 21 Apr. 1970, annotated by Nixon, and memo, Nixon to Dent, 21 Apr. 1970, “Memos – April 1970,” box 2, WHSF-SMOF: President’s Personal Files.

send contributions to an administration fund under his control and under the supervision of his chief of staff, H. R. Haldeman. The fund raised approximately \$1.6 million, which was distributed to the campaigns of selected Republican candidates.²³ George Bush, for example, received \$112,000.²⁴ The budget in 1970 for conventional sources of Republican campaign funding amounted to about \$11 million.²⁵

The most significant element of Nixon's work for the Republican Party was his effort to impose a common theme on the midterm campaign. He sent his Vice President, Spiro Agnew, on an extensive set of appearances to talk about this theme, and his aides sent instructions to other candidates about which points to stress on the stump. Nixon himself undertook midterm commitments of a scale unusual for a sitting President, visiting twenty-three states in total.²⁶ The theme was opposition to what Nixon described as "radical liberalism." Radical liberals were those who opposed him on Vietnam – an issue of particular importance to his administration – and those who took a tolerant approach to "permissiveness" and "law and order" – two cornerstones of controversy at this time. Nixon's conception of radical liberalism, by contrast, devalued traditional Republican concerns about small government and laissez-faire economics. The need to crowd out discussion of bread-and-butter issues was particularly acute in 1970 because the state of the economy was weak enough to endanger the in-party's prospects.²⁷ But Nixon rejoiced in the arrival of new concerns that related to the social upheaval of this time and to the emerging criticism of American foreign policy; the Republican Party could gain ground through conservative positions towards developments and by encouraging Democrats to defend liberal positions.²⁸ "There's a realignment going on," he told his aides at the

²³ Memo, Charles Ruff and Roger Witten to Leon Jaworski, 20 Aug. 1974, "Townhouse 1 of 2," box 1, Campaign Contributions Task Force File #807 relating to the Townhouse Investigation, RG 460: Records of the Watergate Special Prosecution Force, National Archives, College Park, Maryland; Bill Peterson, "GOP 'Townhouse Operation': The Underbelly of Politics," *Washington Post*, 6 July 1976, A1, A6.

²⁴ Memo, Charles Ruff to Leon Jaworski, 19 August 1974, "Townhouse 1 of 2," box 1, Campaign Contributions Task Force File #807 relating to the Townhouse Investigation, RG 460 Records.

²⁵ Memo, Rogers C. B. Morton to Dent, 13 October 1969, "Memos to the President 1969 (3 of 3)," box 2, WHSF-SMOF: Dent.

²⁶ Jeffrey Karpf, "National Party Campaigns for Congress: Trends from 1954–1986," senior thesis, Yale University, 1988.

²⁷ Allen J. Matusow, *Nixon's Economy: Booms, Busts, Dollars, and Votes* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 81–83.

²⁸ Haldeman notes, 10 and 11 July 1970, "H Notes July–September '70 (July–Aug. 6, 1970) Part I," box 42, WHSF-SMOF: H. R. Haldeman, NPMP.

start of the campaign.²⁹ If they dealt with this realigning opportunity correctly, he thought, the Republican Party would develop an enduring advantage among the electorate.

The campaign against radical liberalism was not conventionally partisan; it did not describe the conflict over issues as between Republicans and Democrats. Because of its minority status, Nixon thought it advisable to avoid reference to the Republican Party and instead called for a Congress supportive of the administration, while discussing the perils of radical liberalism.³⁰ It was even possible, according to Nixon's definition, that radical liberals were in the Republican Party. He judged it beneficial to his cause to promote ideological coherence within the party system, believing that there were more opponents of radical liberalism in the United States than supporters of the Republican Party. Nixon's interest in blurring the existing lines of party difference to the greater benefit of conservative politics led him effectively to withdraw administration support from a Republican senator seeking re-election. The Republican was Charles Goodell of New York, who had offended Nixon on the grounds of his dovish views about the Vietnam War; the alternative preferred by the administration was James Buckley, standing as a Conservative. At the same time Nixon did not wish to oppose friendly Democrats, and he discouraged Arthur Fletcher, his Assistant Secretary of Labor, from running against Henry "Scoop" Jackson, the Democratic senator from Washington, his supporter on crucial issues of foreign policy.³¹ Not surprisingly, many Republicans did not like these examples of party leadership.

The campaign against radical liberalism was dramatic. Opening the campaign in early September, Spiro Agnew associated many Democratic politicians with the unlawful protest of the era:

The issue is whether a free people operating under a free and representative system of government will govern the United States, or whether they will cede that power to some of the people, the irresponsible people, the lawbreakers on the streets and campuses and their followers, their sycophants, and the people who subscribe to their activities behind the scenes, the radical liberals.³²

²⁹ William L. Safire, *Before the Fall: An Inside View of the Pre-Watergate White House* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 316.

³⁰ Memo, Haldeman to Keogh, 13 July 1970, "(HRH – July–August, 1970 Staff Memos – E-K) (Part II)," box 62, WHSF-SMOF: Haldeman; memo, Nixon to Haldeman, 21 Sept. 1970, "Memos (Aug.)–September 1970," box 2, WHSF-SMOF: President's Personal Files.

³¹ Memo, Dent to Nixon, 22 Dec. 1969, "December 16 thru 31, 1969," box 4, WHSF-SMOF: President's Office Files, NPMP; memo, Dent to Brown, 9 Jan. 1970, "January 1 thru 15, 1970," box 4, WHSF-SMOF: President's Office Files.

³² Theo Lippman, Jr., *Spiro Agnew's America* (New York: Norton, 1972), 212–13.

He claimed that these radical liberals were “neo-isolationists in foreign policy, at a time when neo-isolationism invites communist aggression” and “social permissivists, at a time when America just can’t stand more permissiveness if this society is to control the radicalism tearing at its roots.”³³ Although Nixon aimed to maintain an elevated tone during his campaign appearances, in contrast with Agnew, in practice he did not.³⁴ On foreign policy he attacked the “officeholders and candidates who try to demean their country and who counsel defeat and humiliation for America,” while on crime he used a famous phrase of Franklin Roosevelt’s to claim that his opponents had “all but forgotten the right of innocent people to enjoy freedom from fear.”³⁵ In short, he tried to associate the so-called radical liberals with the social tumult of the day, and he tried to accuse them of lacking patriotism.

Nixon’s intervention in the midterm campaign of 1970 sought to develop an area of ongoing strength for the party – that is, the opposition to radical liberalism. In doing so, its short-term aim was to secure the election of more congressional Republicans, particularly in the Senate. In this effort to boost Republican fortunes, personal goals were important. First, Nixon wanted to strengthen his administration by securing a Congress more supportive of his policies. Legislative acceptance of his foreign policy was an especially consequential consideration. Nixon sought to challenge the growing anti-war bloc in Congress which questioned his Vietnam policy more and more vociferously and more and more effectively.³⁶ Second, Nixon believed that a strong showing in 1970 would help his prospects for re-election in 1972. The midterm campaign against “radical liberalism” provided him, he thought, with an opportunity to develop productive themes against the Democrats and, more concretely, to wound potential Democratic nominees against his bid for re-election. Nixon intended the campaign to damage Edmund Muskie, Edward Kennedy and Hubert Humphrey by branding them leftists rather than moderates, and thus harm their prospects for 1972.³⁷

But the accomplishments of 1970 failed to realize Nixon’s goals. The campaign against the radical liberals encountered a number of difficulties. First, the imposition of a common theme on campaigns across the country

³³ Robert W. Peterson, ed., *Agnew: The Coining of a Household Word* (New York: Facts on File, 1972), 125.

³⁴ Haldeman, *Diaries*, 12 Oct. 1970.

³⁵ “Suggested Basic Campaign Text,” 13 Oct. 1970, “October 1970, Basic Campaign Text,” box 61, WHSF-SMOF: President’s Personal Files.

³⁶ Elizabeth B. Drew, “The White House Hard Hats,” *Atlantic*, Oct. 1970, 54–56.

³⁷ Haldeman, *Diaries*, 26 Sept. 1970; memo, Haldeman to Bryce Harlow, “HRH-Staff Memos-HRH September, 1970 D-J,” box 64, WHSF-SMOF: Haldeman.

failed when some Republican candidates did not follow Nixon's strategy. A notable example was Clark MacGregor, the President's chosen candidate in Minnesota against Hubert Humphrey, the former Vice President and the Democratic presidential candidate in 1968. To the concern of Nixon's political aides, MacGregor declined to follow guidance from the White House about how he should run his campaign against Humphrey.³⁸ Second, Democratic candidates refused to stand silent as they were branded radical liberals. Members of Congress were wise to Nixon's effort to identify them as soft on crime and soft on drugs – a key strand of the "permissiveness" which radical liberals supposedly condoned. During the autumn Congress passed two important measures to challenge this characterization. The first was the Comprehensive Drug Abuse Prevention and Control Act of 1970, strengthening penalties for drugs offences and extending programmes against drug abuse. Second, both houses of Congress also passed versions of an Omnibus Crime Control Act that increased spending on anti-crime initiatives.³⁹ The same resistance to the radical liberal strategy appeared on the campaign trail. In Illinois, for example, Ralph Smith, the incumbent senator, accused his challenger, Adlai Stevenson III, of radical liberalism. "When I see Adlai," Smith said, "I see red." Stevenson challenged such accusations. He wore a flag pin in his lapel and made it clear that he was no radical, speaking of the need for tough responses to violent crime.⁴⁰ When in Florida William Cramer invoked the same strategy, the argument that his opponent, Lawton Chiles (a self-described "progressive conservative"), was a radical lacked credibility.⁴¹ The same was true in other states, including Utah, Wyoming and Texas, where George H. W. Bush's Democratic opponent was not liberal Ralph Yarborough after all, but instead the decidedly more conservative Lloyd Bentsen.⁴²

Judged by the results of these midterm contests, the strategy to strengthen the Republican contingent in Congress and, more ambitiously still, to redraw the lines of party conflict failed; there was little return for Nixon's activist

³⁸ Memos, Haldeman to Murray Chotiner, 7 and 24 Sept. 1970, "HRH-Staff Memos-HRH September, 1970 B-C," box 64, WHSF-SMOF: Haldeman.

³⁹ *Congress and the Nation*, Vol. 3: 1969–1972 (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1973), 256–77.

⁴⁰ Steven V. Roberts, "Conservatives Press Campus Unrest Issue," *New York Times*, 11 Oct. 1970, 70.

⁴¹ Bartley and Graham, *Southern Politics and the Second Reconstruction*, 147; Philip D. Carter, "It Really IS a Footrace in Florida," *Washington Post*, 25 Oct. 1970, B1.

⁴² Frank H. Jonas and Dan E. Jones, "The 1970 Elections in Utah," *Western Political Quarterly*, 24 (1971), 339–49; John B. Richard, "The 1970 Elections in Wyoming," *Western Political Quarterly*, 24 (1971), 363–68; *The Economist*, 31 Oct. 1970, 44–45.

endeavours. First, the midterm elections failed to change the balance in Congress either to the benefit of Republicans or to the detriment of radical liberals. On the one hand, Republicans made two gains in the Senate, and some key targets of the administration were defeated, including Albert Gore in Tennessee and Charles Goodell in New York. On the other hand, there was a net loss of twelve seats for the Republicans in the House, and many of Nixon's candidates for the Senate were defeated, including George H. W. Bush and Clark MacGregor. Indeed, on the important issue of Vietnam, the new Congress was marginally, if not notably, more critical of Nixon.⁴³ Although by historical comparison these results were a respectable midterm showing for the in-party, they were a disappointment in light of the energy invested by the administration in the campaign. Second, it was widely agreed that the costs of the campaign were high for Nixon, because much of the press reaction to its aggressiveness was hostile. There was little doubt among White House aides that the stress on radical liberalism had worked to Nixon's personal disadvantage, instead of inflicting damage on key Democrats.⁴⁴ Third, and most important for party-building, there was no evidence that the campaign had changed popular ideas about the party system and the ideological divisions at its heart. Polls conducted by the White House during the campaign suggested that many people remained unaware of the administration's campaign against radical liberalism. Those who knew about it responded in a partisan way; Republican voters viewed the administration's message favourably, Democratic voters unfavourably.⁴⁵ In short, there was no party redefinition. Nixon's goals had been ambitious; his accomplishments were unimpressive.

The second main strand of Nixon's party-building initiatives involved a strategy of recruitment. Like the strategy of redefinition, this sought Republican gains by blurring the lines of difference between the two parties. But rather than pursuing new issues that polarized public opinion, the recruitment strategy sought to strengthen the Republican contingent in Congress and the states by persuading conservative Democratic politicians, particularly those from the South, to join the GOP. It was clearly necessary to convince them that the Republican Party was not only more ideologically

⁴³ Charles DeBenedetti with Charles Chatfield, *An American Ordeal: The Antivietnam Movement of the Vietnam Era* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990), 293.

⁴⁴ See, for example, memo, Ray Price to Nixon, 13 Nov. 1970, memo, William Safire to Nixon, 11 Nov. 1970, and memo, Herbert Klein to Nixon, 11 Nov. 1970, "November 1970," box 8, WHSF-SMOF: President's Office Files.

⁴⁵ Memo, David R. Derge to Haldeman, 13 Oct. 1970, "HRH, Derge, Summaries, Memos, Analyses," box 403, WHSF-SMOF: Haldeman.

congenial than the Democratic, but also a better place to pursue their political ambition. It was a good time for a Republican President to make this argument, because some Southern Democrats were under attack in two ways within their own party. First, liberals were questioning with increasing effectiveness the institutional advantages of the conservative South in Congress and especially in the House.⁴⁶ The future of those advantages was therefore in jeopardy. Second, the importance of moderates at the state and local levels was growing in parts of the South, thus challenging the conservatives' control of the Democratic Party.⁴⁷ Their yearning to hold on to political power therefore had the potential to interest some Southern conservatives in a switch to the Republican Party, although the diversity of politics in the South varied the likelihood of this prospect from state to state.⁴⁸

But the prospect of conversions among Democrats dismayed those Republicans who wanted their party to win the support of a new moderate South, not that of an old South of economic elitism and of racial conservatism.⁴⁹ Some had devoted considerable energy to building exactly such a party, and the arrival of such Democrats in their party would be a blow to this vision, as well as to the political ambitions of many existing Republicans. Although the overall climate of the Republican Party was becoming more conservative during this period, this was not a development to which a party leader was expected to contribute.⁵⁰ Presidents generally avoided overt intervention in any matter involving inter-factional dispute; Nixon's willingness to do otherwise – in opposing Goodell as well as in wooing conservative Democrats – more identifies him as a party leader ready to impose his vision for its future than demonstrates a cooperative and more neutral approach to this area of presidential responsibility.

⁴⁶ John F. Manley, "The Conservative Coalition in Congress," in *Congress Reconsidered*, ed. Lawrence C. Dodd and Bruce I. Oppenheimer (New York: Praeger, 1977), 90–93.

⁴⁷ Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics: Social Change and Political Consequence since 1945* (1976; rept. New York: Meridian, 1977), 38–40.

⁴⁸ On variety within Southern politics see Earl Black and Merle Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 72–137.

⁴⁹ See, for example, Republicans for Progress, "Southern Project Report," 13 Apr. 1966, "Congress of Republican Organizations 1964–68," box 2, Political Files, Walter N. Thayer Papers, Herbert Hoover Library, West Branch, Iowa.

⁵⁰ On the rise of conservatism within the Republican Party and the decline of liberalism see Mary C. Brennan, *Turning Right in the Sixties: The Conservative Capture of the GOP* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Nicol C. Rae, *The Decline and Fall of the Liberal Republicans: From 1952 to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); and David W. Reinhard, *The Republican Right since 1945* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983).

The first opportunity to win the conversion of a key Democrat arrived in 1970. James Sweeney has chronicled the assiduous work of Nixon in “project Okinawa,” designed to persuade Harry Byrd, Virginia’s incumbent senator, to switch to his party after the 1970 election or at least to vote for Republican organization of the Senate. Byrd had decided to run for re-election as an independent when his prospects for the Democratic nomination looked bleak, because the influence of his Byrdite faction was in decline.⁵¹ To the consternation of Republicans in Virginia, the President then declined to support their candidate, Ray L. Garland, considered a model “new-Southern” politician, in order to pursue Byrd.⁵² This cultivation of Byrd was a particular disappointment for the state’s mountain valley Republicans who sought to promote a moderate alternative to the Byrdite Democrats, although their fellow Republicans in the north and east of the state took a much more conservative approach to politics.⁵³ Despite these costs to party harmony, project Okinawa failed. Traditional loyalties to his fellow conservative Democrats reinforced Byrd’s disinclination to contribute to the decline of Southern power in Congress, and he voted for Democratic organization of the Ninety-Second Congress. In the view of the Nixon administration, moderate Governor Linwood Holton, who supported Garland’s candidacy against Byrd, acted in ways that obstructed an effort to boost Republican fortunes in Virginia and the South.⁵⁴

Instead of Byrd the symbol of the conversion effort became John Connally, whom Nixon appointed as Treasury Secretary near the end of 1970. The former Governor of Texas, popularly if inaccurately linked with Lyndon Johnson, Connally remained a Democrat while serving in the Nixon administration. The presence in the Cabinet of a politician from the opposing party was by no means unusual, but the prominence of the role that Connally would play in the Nixon administration and, so Nixon hoped, in a reshaped Republican Party was most unusual. Connally, as a Democrat, became a central figure in Nixon’s re-election campaign of 1972 as the leader of “Democrats for Nixon.” Nixon had, in fact, wanted Connally to take over as Vice President on his way to the presidency in 1976; he briefly thought of nominating Agnew to the Supreme Court to create a vacancy before swiftly

⁵¹ James R. Sweeney, “Southern Strategies: The 1970 Election for the United States Senate in Virginia,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 106 (1998), 165–68.

⁵² Letter, Harry Flemming to Nixon, 22 Oct. 1969, “(CF) PL/ST #33–51 (Political Affairs) (1969–70),” box 47, White House Special Files – Central Files (Confidential Files), NPMF.

⁵³ Sweeney, 167–68.

⁵⁴ Frank B. Atkinson, *The Dynamic Dominion: Realignment and the Rise of Virginia’s Republican Party Since 1945* (Fairfax, VA: George Mason University Press, 1992), 210–15.

deciding that the Senate might well not confirm him. Just as many Virginia Republicans viewed the prospect of Byrd's conversion with alarm, so some Republicans were unenthusiastic about Connally as the face of their party's future. "Frankly, I don't think the Houston Petroleum Club is a very firm footing for a new Republican majority," wrote Douglas Hallett, a young conservative working as a White House aide, in August of 1972. He thought it unwise that the party should "become a refuge for antidiluvian [*sic*] southern Democrats."⁵⁵

The launch of Democrats for Nixon, which played a very prominent role in the 1972 campaign, was the source of particular frustration for Republicans. In downplaying his Republican identity and in emphasizing his ideological affinity with leading Democrats, Nixon was apparently guilty more than ever of party neglect. Because of the Republicans' minority status, Nixon's personal interest in securing re-election came into conflict with any desire to win conversions and thus to build the party. In 1972 Nixon sought the endorsement of leading Democrats, but he did not want these Democrats to transfer to the Republican Party; the political symbolism of an endorsement from a disaffected Democrat was far more powerful evangelism than that of support from a new Republican.

This personal consideration damaged the most ambitious strand of the recruitment strategy, a Republican takeover of the House of Representatives by mass conversion of Democrats. Although few Democrats in the Senate were as ready as Byrd to consider a change of party, House Democrats were more likely to switch. In early 1971 Nixon discussed with Republican leaders in the House the possibility of creating a congressional coalition between Republicans and conservative Democrats, thus formalizing and institutionalizing the conservative coalition which had emerged during the later years of the New Deal.⁵⁶ As campaign season approached in summer 1972, House minority leader Gerald Ford returned to the idea. He wished to exploit the Nixon campaign's cultivation of Democratic leaders and voters, using the argument that their candidate, George McGovern, was too left-wing for their party's traditions. Ford hoped that this theme might boost the numbers of the Republican contingent in the House through what he called "operation switch[-]over." But Nixon was now unenthusiastic about the idea, sure that fewer Democratic voters would support him if they decided by party rather than between individual politicians. He therefore

⁵⁵ Memo, Douglas Hallett to Colson, 10 Aug. 1972, "Political Strategy 1972," box 99, WHSF-SMOF: Colson.

⁵⁶ Memo, Haldeman to file, 5 May 1971, "Beginning May 2, 1971," box 85, WHSF-SMOF: President's Office Files.

discouraged this congressional initiative to build the party at least until after the election.⁵⁷

Despite his involvement in project Okinawa just two years before, Nixon not only discouraged “operation switch-over,” but even offered help to conservative Democrats who had supported him, especially on foreign policy. This aid extended beyond congressional diplomacy; it encompassed tangible help for the campaigns of incumbent Democrats.⁵⁸ In 1972 the administration withheld help from the Republican candidates standing against Senators James Eastland in Mississippi and John McClellan in Arkansas; both Eastland and McClellan had loyally supported Nixon on Vietnam, and it was thought that Eastland, like Byrd, was a potential convert to the Republicans.⁵⁹ In a meeting with Eastland, Nixon said that he, McClellan and John C. Stennis of Mississippi “had been helped to the Administration and voted better than a lot of Republicans.”⁶⁰ Many other congressional Democrats – up to seventy-six in the House – benefited from Nixon’s disinclination to oppose those friendly to his administration, especially with respect to its Vietnam policy.⁶¹ In some cases, Nixon not only discouraged opposition to conservative Democrats but also offered them more active forms of assistance. He told his daughter, Tricia Nixon Cox, to endorse the candidacies of Eastland and McClellan when she visited the South during the campaign.⁶² Moreover, he invited a number of incumbent House Democrats from the South to the White House for a photo session – a significant act when many Republican candidates justifiably felt that they were receiving no help of any kind from the administration.⁶³

The personal advantage for Nixon of association with a popular incumbent was obvious. The disadvantage for Republican candidates was equally

⁵⁷ Haldeman, *Diaries*, 21 July 1972.

⁵⁸ On Nixon’s continuing interest in maintaining good relations with conservative Democrats in Congress see, for example, memo, Haldeman to Chapin, 27 Nov. 1970, “HRH – Staff Memos – C December, 1970,” box 67, WHSF-SMOF: Haldeman; and memo, Raymond Price to file, 5 Nov. 1971, “Cabinet – 11/5/71,” box 119, WHSF-SMOF: President’s Personal Files.

⁵⁹ Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978), 669; Manley, “Conservative Coalition in Congress,” 95; R. W. Apple, Jr., “Nixon Seeking Re-election of Eastland, a Democrat,” *New York Times*, 1 Oct. 1972, 46.

⁶⁰ Memo, William E. Timmons to Nixon’s file, 9 Oct. 1972, “October 8 (1972),” box 90, WHSF-SMOF: President’s Office Files.

⁶¹ *Washington Post*, 21 Mar. 1973, A6; Harry S. Dent, *The Prodigal South Returns to Power* (New York: Wiley, 1978), 223.

⁶² Haldeman, *Diaries*, 26 Sept. 1972.

⁶³ Memos, John E. Niedecker to file, 12 and 14 Sept. 1972, “Beginning September 10, (1972),” box 89, WHSF-SMOF: President’s Office Files; memo, Niedecker to file, 18 Sept. 1972, “Beginning September 17 (1972),” box 89, WHSF-SMOF: President’s Office Files.

obvious. It would be helpful for the Republican Party at large only if some of these Democrats decided to convert as well as support Nixon in 1972. Where an opportunity to win conversions was consistent with his own political goals Nixon promoted that prospect. In August he invited a group of Virginia Democrats to the White House. The group was led by Mills Godwin, the state's former Governor, who had formed a 1200-strong committee of Virginians for the President. Nixon spoke to the group of his admiration for Harry Byrd and he "indicated his interest in realignment of the political parties along moderate-conservative and liberal lines."⁶⁴ Following this meeting, Richard Obenshain, chairman of the state Republican Party, requested a similar invitation for Virginia Republicans.⁶⁵ But although an invitation to the White House was forthcoming, it did not include an appointment with the President.⁶⁶

With the endorsement of prominent Democrats and the defection of many Democratic voters to his support, Nixon won a landslide victory in 1972. Nixon called his coalition of Republicans, Democrats and independent voters a "new majority." It was a personal victory, and Republicans did not make gains elsewhere. If Republican gains were to arrive on the basis of cross-party conversions, the aftermath of the 1972 election was the critical moment. There was indeed talk at this time in Washington and even at the White House about the possibility of a mass conversion in Congress.⁶⁷ But Ford's ambition to become Speaker of the House through operation switch-over was not realized. According to investigations by Godfrey Hodgson, the approach of the Watergate scandal dissuaded Democrats from changing party.⁶⁸ By contrast, according to the research of A. James Reichley, the shortness of Nixon's coat-tails in 1972 meant that the margin between Republicans and Democrats remained too wide for conversions to bridge. Interviews with politicians which Reichley later conducted suggest that about twenty Democrats in the House were potential converts, while twenty-six

⁶⁴ Memo, Dent to file, 7 Aug. 1972, "Beginning August 6 (1972)," box 89, WHSF-SMOF: President's Office Files.

⁶⁵ Letter, Richard D. Obenshain to Colson, 9 Aug. 1972, "Support for Nixon," box 115, WHSF-SMOF: Colson.

⁶⁶ Memo, Colson to Dent, 16 Aug. 1972, memo, Dent to Colson, 17 Aug. 1972, and letter, Howard to Obenshain, 18 Aug. 1972, "Support for Nixon," box 115, WHSF-SMOF: Colson.

⁶⁷ William A. Rusher, *The Rise of the Right* (New York: William Morrow, 1984), 251; Haldeman, *Diaries*, 2 Dec. 1972.

⁶⁸ Godfrey Hodgson, *The World Turned Right Side up: A History of the Conservative Ascendancy in America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 123–27. The claim wins support in Melvin Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999), 243.

Democrats were necessary to secure Republican organization of the House.⁶⁹ Limited evidence from the White House suggests that its own estimate of possible recruits was lower rather than higher, thus supporting Reichley rather than Hodgson.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, for different reasons, both views attach responsibility to Nixon for the failure of operation switch-over. Noting that the claims are “difficult to verify,” Julian Zelizer points out that the talk of possible conversions “reflects the tension that existed inside Congress at this time” surrounding liberals’ reform plans that would undermine the influence of conservative Democrats.⁷¹

The results of the recruitment strategy outside Congress were barely more impressive. John Connally, the figurehead of Democrats for Nixon and, in Nixon’s view, the face of America’s political future, switched to the Republicans in the spring. For Connally it was clear that he could not realize his presidential ambitions in the Democratic Party but he might in a Nixonian Republican Party.⁷² But even Connally had little enthusiasm for his new political home as the Watergate scandal hit; George H. W. Bush, the new national chairman, soon reported that, despite Nixon’s desire to promote him as a leading spokesman for the administration, Connally had turned down at least 400 invitations to speak before Republican groups.⁷³

Beyond Connally, there were few new recruits, although Agnew travelled to the South at the end of 1972 where he made a direct appeal for converts; he argued that Southern Democrats and Republicans shared an anti-government approach to politics.⁷⁴ A handful of Connally Democrats in Texas switched, continuing the Republican trend there.⁷⁵ More promising was the situation in Virginia. In February State Chairman Obenshain reported that former Governor Godwin had agreed to accept the Republican

⁶⁹ James Reichley interview with Bud Shuster, 6 Oct. 1977, “Shuster, Bud,” box 2, A. James Reichley Interviews, Gerald R. Ford Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan; James Reichley interview with William Timmons, 29 Nov. 1977, “Timmons, William,” box 1, Reichley Interviews; James Reichley interview with Joe Waggoner, 8 Feb. 1978, “Waggoner, Joe,” box 2, Reichley Interviews.

⁷⁰ Memo, Richard K. Cook to Timmons, box 17, WHSF-SMOF: President’s Office Files.

⁷¹ Julian E. Zelizer, *On Capitol Hill: The Struggle to Reform Congress and Its Consequences, 1948–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 137.

⁷² James Reston, *The Lone Star: The Life of John Connally* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 453–54.

⁷³ Memo, Rose Mary Woods to Richard Nixon, 19 Jun. 1973, “Bush, George,” box 6, WHSF-SMOF: President’s Personal Files.

⁷⁴ Speech by Agnew, 12 Dec. 1972, “Operation Switch Over – Tallahassee, Florida,” box 10, subseries 7, series III, Spiro T. Agnew Papers, University of Maryland, College Park.

⁷⁵ Carolyn Barta, “Texas House Ex-Speaker Joins GOP,” *Washington Post*, 15 May 1973, A4.

nomination in the gubernatorial race of 1973.⁷⁶ The conversion of Democrats in the state assembly was likely to follow, provided that Republicans honoured their seniority and demonstrated what Godwin called “patience and flexibility.”⁷⁷ By 1974 the Republican Party in Virginia was strong enough that the state at last fully enjoyed a two-party system.⁷⁸

It was not just in the South where recruits were sought in 1973, and it was not just in the South where the effort was a failure. Nixon hoped to welcome at least one urban conservative from the North to the Republican Party, too. The key target was Frank Rizzo, the Democratic Mayor of Philadelphia who endorsed Nixon in 1972; in return Philadelphia received some impressively large infusions of federal money.⁷⁹ But Rizzo resisted the argument that as a Republican, not as a Democrat, he was a strong contender to become gubernatorial nominee.⁸⁰ He remained a Democrat, at least in the short to medium term, and he remained Mayor of Philadelphia.

Altogether, the recruitment strategy enjoyed little more success than the redefinition strategy. The Republican Party picked up a number of new recruits, but neither in Congress nor in any of the states did mass conversions take place to bring new areas of political control to the Republicans. It is, indeed, not clear that the recruitment strategy won over any Democrats who would otherwise have remained in the Democratic Party. Conflict within the Democratic Party and the frustration of personal ambition account for the conversions, not recruitment efforts on the Republican side. Nixon’s own contribution to the process was sometimes weak. While he energetically cultivated Harry Byrd, and he happily contemplated the transfer of conservative Democrats to the Republican Party, his desire to secure a large personal victory in 1972 undermined the conversion effort.

⁷⁶ Memo, Ed DeBolt and Jim Galbraith to George Bush, 22 Feb. 1973, “February 16–28, 1973,” box 20, WHSF-SMOF: President’s Office Files.

⁷⁷ Memo, Flanigan to Nixon, 26 Feb. 1973, annotated by Timmons, “(CF) PL/ST# (Political Affairs) (1971–74),” box 47, White House Special Files – Central Files (Confidential Files).

⁷⁸ Monroe Lee Billington, *The Political South in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Scribner’s, 1975), 166.

⁷⁹ Memo, John Ehrlichman to Richard Nixon, 20 July 1972, annotated by Nixon, “July 16–31, 1972,” box 18, WHSF-SMOF: President’s Office Files; memo, Bud Krogh to Ehrlichman, 18 July 1972, “July 16–31, 1972,” box 18, WHSF-SMOF: President’s Office Files; memo, Krogh to Cole, 13 Sept. 1972, “(Memos, September 1972),” box 5, WHSF-SMOF: Egil M. Krogh, NPMP.

⁸⁰ Memo, George Bush to Nixon, 8 Mar. 1973, annotated by Nixon, “March 1–10, 1973,” and memo, Bruce Kehrli to H. R. Haldeman, 13 Mar. 1973, “March 11 thru 31, 1973,” box 21, WHSF-SMOF: President’s Office Files.

After the landslide of 1972 the imperative of re-election was no longer a factor for Nixon. He began to think about a new strategy for party-building at this time, one more conventional than the others. He paid more attention to the national committee. It was time, he decided, for the party assume responsibility for consolidating the “new majority” which supported him in 1972.⁸¹ He began to develop a new vision for the national committee, which “would be upgraded,” he said, and “dedicated to campaign management and candidate recruitment.”⁸² But as Nixon showed more interest in the national committee, some Republicans were concerned about the centralizing nature of his plans. Members of the Ripon Society, a group of liberal Republicans, claimed that Nixon sought “the creation of the first ever national political machine in American history,” to the detriment of local organizations. “They could have encouraged,” wrote Clifford Brown, “the election of candidates who would play ball with the team while discouraging the election of others.”⁸³ But this third potential initiative of party-building – a strategy of organizational revitalization and centralization – fell victim to the Watergate scandal.

The Watergate scandal would, of course, cause yet further problems for the Republican Party in the mid-1970s. But even in the absence of Watergate, Republican activists had little reason to see Nixon as an effective leader of their party. Despite the talk of a conservative opportunity at this time, the Republican Party was not stronger in 1973 than it had been in 1969. It did not have a significantly larger number of elected politicians in office, and the party’s popularity among the electorate was no greater. In short, Nixon had not successfully tackled the problem of the party’s minority status. Despite this poor outcome, Nixon had been an activist as party leader. He pursued some imaginative strategies to build the party where they were consistent with his own political goals within a context of candidate-centred electoral politics, and he did so to a greater extent than his immediate predecessors in the White House.

Nixon had a ready explanation for the failure of his party-building initiatives. He placed the blame not on the shortcomings of those initiatives,

⁸¹ Nixon, *RN*, 769; memo, Timmons to file, 28 Nov. 1972.

⁸² Memo, Timmons to file, 28 Nov. 1972, “Beginning November 26 (1972),” box 90, WHSF-SMOF: President’s Office Files; memo, by Haldeman, 8 Jan. 1973, “Action Memos 1973,” box 113, WHSF-SMOF: Haldeman; memo, Buchanan to file, 30 Nov. 1972, “November 1972,” box 2, WHSF-SMOF: Patrick J. Buchanan, NPMP.

⁸³ The Ripon Society and Clifford W. Brown, Jr., *Jaws of Victory: The Game-Plan Politics of 1972, the Crisis of the Republican Party, and the Future of the Constitution* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), 236–38.

but on his fellow Republicans. In response to the disappointing results of the 1970 midterm campaign he complained to Haldeman that the Republican candidates were “so poor” they had failed to inspire any enthusiasm among the electorate.⁸⁴ Similarly, in 1972, he complained to a journalist that his party had “a lot of lousy candidates.”⁸⁵ Nixon’s frustration with the Republican Party as an electoral vehicle is revealed most acutely by his tendency to talk with his aides from time to time about the desirability of a new Conservative Party as a replacement for the Republican Party.⁸⁶ This self-serving explanation carries little weight in explaining what happened during this period. His contemptuous attitude towards the Republican Party does, however, help us to understand why his approach to party leadership was adversarial and centralizing in nature, rather than cooperative and respectful of localism. It also helps to explain the more positive consequences of Nixon’s concern, which was to emphasize candidate recruitment in the aftermath of the 1972 elections.

When Nixon’s initiatives are viewed within modern political history more broadly, they seem more constructive and productive. Over the decades following Nixon’s presidency, conservative positions on social issues and on foreign policy were often useful for the party in winning elections.⁸⁷ The South gradually became a source of Republican strength in Congress as well as a fertile area for the party’s presidential candidates.⁸⁸ Moreover, there are some similarities between Nixon’s conception after his re-election of a new role for the national committee and the innovative achievements of the RNC under William Brock towards the end of the 1970s.⁸⁹ But there is no clear link between these developments and Nixon’s leadership. First, the emergence of a new conservatism within the Republican Party was securely in place before Nixon’s tenure in the White House, thanks in particular to the unsuccessful presidential candidacy of Barry Goldwater, and it would receive

⁸⁴ Notes by H. R. Haldeman, 2 Nov. 1970, in Joan Hoff-Wilson, series ed., *Papers of the Nixon White House*, microfilm, Part 5: *H. R. Haldeman: Notes of White House Meetings, 1969–1973* (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1989).

⁸⁵ Theodore H. White, *The Making of the President 1972* (New York: Atheneum, 1973), 321.

⁸⁶ Haldeman, *Diaries*, 11 July 1970 and 17 Jan. 1972; John Ehrlichman, *Witness to Power: The Nixon Years* (New York: Pocket, 1982), 232–33.

⁸⁷ Byron E. Shafer, “The Notion of an Electoral Order: The Structure of Electoral Politics at the Accession of George Bush,” in *idem*, ed., *The End of Realignment? Interpreting American Electoral Eras* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 37–84.

⁸⁸ Black and Black, *The Rise of Southern Republicans*; Joseph A. Aistrup, *The Southern Strategy Revisited: Republican Top-Down Advancement in the South* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996).

⁸⁹ Cornelius P. Cotter and John F. Bibby, “Institutional Development of Parties and the Thesis of Party Decline,” *Political Science Quarterly*, 95 (1980), 18–19.

fresh momentum under Ronald Reagan. Second, pioneering work on the development of Republican strength in the South began in the 1950s, and because of the failure to win many party transfers among Southern Democrats the Nixon years did not witness any notable quickening of the pace of the Southern drift towards the GOP. Third, efforts to revitalize the national committee did not progress under Nixon beyond plans. Brock instead pursued and expanded an agenda initiated by his 1960s predecessor as Republican national chair, Ray Bliss.⁹⁰ Altogether, the location of Nixon's party-building initiatives within a longer-term context therefore confirms their wisdom as ways to boost Republican fortunes, but it also underscores the lack of shorter-term success achieved by these initiatives.

Ultimately, Nixon was unable to resolve the contradictory impulses created by the problem of minority status and the promise of majority status. Although accounts of this period sometimes overlook the significance of Nixon's work for the Republican Party, they are nevertheless right to conclude that, where the concerns of candidate-centred politics came into conflict with the goals of party-focussed politics, Nixon retreated to an obsession with the need to build a new American majority, rather than a new Republican majority.

⁹⁰ Philip A. Klinkner, "A Comparison of Out-Party Leaders: Ray Bliss and Bill Brock," in *Politics, Professionalism, and Power: Modern Party Organization and the Legacy of Ray C. Bliss*, ed. John C. Green (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994), 135–48.